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Student Attitude and Motivation Regarding Testing at Hermantown High School

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Abstract

School districts all over the country use some sort of, if not several, standardized type tests to evaluate either the performance of its students, the district, its teachers, or all three. Sometimes these tests are state mandated, and others are administered by private companies by the commissioning of the school district. The Hermantown School District, located in Minnesota, uses several of these tests for a variety of reasons. After the district failed to make AYP for the last two years, the administration made a move to examine the cause of such a failure. The first step in the process of this evaluation is to attempt to identify the general attitude and motivation held by students in regards to these types of tests. This study looks to identify possible patterns in attitude held by Hermantown students in regards to these tests and to identify the steps the District can take to improve the AYP.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Hermantown School District has failed to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) according to the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) for the last two years. The district also uses several other forms of testing to evaluate student and district achievement that are similar to the state tests.

There have been several parties that have expressed their concern and interest in the potential ramifications that such testing results may mean for the district in terms of funding and curriculum planning. The Hermantown School District has been in the process of brainstorming different ideas and approaches to the standardized tests so that we may better educate, motivate, and prepare its students for success on such tests; tests which essentially equates to the district's success in light of the No Child Left Behind Act. The target of the district is to get students, staff, and parents informed and motivated regarding the tests so that the district will make AYP this year and to consider implementing any additional test preparation programs that can be used to improve student scores on all types of testing situations.

Problem Statement

Information provided by the superintendent of the Hermantown School District has indicated that the school has failed to make AYP as outlined in the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). This has prompted the district to examine any possible reasons for this failure and any means by which they may be addressed and avoided in the future. The purpose of this study is to attempt to discover any patterns in the attitudes of the selected groups from Hermantown School District regarding standardized testing.

Question

What are current student attitudes regarding standardized tests? How can we better prepare students to be motivated to be successful on standardized tests? Can the district staff implement programs that speak to students about the importance and value of the tests while also encouraging them to perform at their highest level? If so, what are some possible ideas?

Rationale for Study

Through the course of this study, the current ninth and tenth graders (2011-12 school year) in the Hermantown School District will be targeted, along with their teachers, in an attempt to discover any patterns or common threads in motivation and attitude regarding the standardized testing and the lack of AYP of the district. This group has been targeted as they are among the students of the district who have not only failed to make AYP for the last two years, but they will also be taking the standardized tests for the next three to four years. If the study is able to identify trends in attitude towards the test, it may be possible to implement programs to inform and motivate students, thus leading to a passing AYP. If this is possible, we would be able to measure an improvement in, or a decline in, test scores of this target group. The results of the study may also prove to be useful in addressing general questions and insights regarding student motivation towards education in general.

Summary of Study

The main focus of this study will be to explore if there are any common patterns among the select group of Hermantown students regarding their understanding and motivation towards success when taking a standardized test. The purpose of this study will be to use those results to

develop and shape possible district programming or curriculum that would be intended to better prepare students for success on standardized tests.

Limitations of Study

This study and its analysis are limited due to the sample set. The students selected for participation in the study were chosen out of convenience. The groups selected were only the 9th and 10th graders of the Hermantown (Minnesota) School District of the 2011-12 school year. For this reason the study will only be applicable to this group of students and perhaps the school district. The geographic location and demographics of the students of the District limit the value of the study for districts of other locations and student make up. The overall sample size is also limiting. The entire student sample group consists of 275 students. This group does not reflect the entire population of the Hermantown School District. Due to these limitations, the findings of this study (as intended) are localized to the Hermantown School District and even more so to the 9th and 10th graders of the 2011-12 school year, though possibly applicable to future classes.

Delimitations of Study

This is not an analysis of any type of test scores themselves. This study is not intended to make any type of generalization for students of this age or grade level for all districts or areas. This study is not intended to make general assumptions about all students in the Hermantown School District. The purpose of the study is instead to find a beginning place to build programming to prepare students for taking and understanding standardized tests. This study will not be actually examining the worth or scores of any type of standardized test. The intent of this study is not to make any kind of correlation between any testing structure and the possible indication of student success in school regarding grades or the future success of the student. The study is intended to

be entirely focused on the attitudes and factors that may influence a student's motivation when taking or preparing for any sort of standardized test. This study does not take into account any type of future plans of the selected student group such as college enrollment or post secondary education or goals. This study is not intended to analyze anything about the students' individual history such as ethnicity, gender, family make up and income, or years in the Hermantown School system.

Assumptions

This study assumes that all students in the selected group understand that they are required by the Hermantown School District to participate in various forms of standardized testing and that they are at least aware that such testing exists. This study also assumes that not all students are aware of the intent or use of each of these tests both in regard to how the test affects their educational future, or how the same scores may affect the school district. The study assumes that all students who complete the survey will answer the questions honestly and anonymously. This study assumes that the Hermantown School District participates in the testing of its students through testing methods that are required by the state of Minnesota, and all methods are ethical and in line normal procedures. This study does not assume that the selected students will be able to analyze or interpret these tests.

Referenced Definition of Terms

The following terms are what will be referenced throughout the study when referring to standardized testing. The term standardized test will also be defined in regards to how it will be reference over the course of the study.

Standardized Test: for the purpose of this study only, this term will refer to any type of test administered by a school district to the entire student body or an entire grade level.

This term will encompass the following defined terms.

Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA): specific state tests that help students measure progress towards Minnesota's academic standards.

Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA): tests that are administered by a private company in order to measure individual student progress at established intervals.

PLAN Test: tests that are taken by tenth grade students in an effort to prepare them to take the ACT (American College Testing – a standardized test of high school achievement and college admissions).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): testing that, in accordance with the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), measures the academic progress of public schools based on the scores of the tests from that district.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is focusing on what seems to motivate students best in terms of academic success. Several studies that examine general motivation patterns of human beings have been reviewed. Something that must be considered when attempting to motivate a student is deciding on the most effective mode or approach to instilling a desire to learn or to succeed in a student. Two of the most common motivational concepts or theories are those of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. These two concepts are regularly examined in the world of education when trying to determine the best way to motivate a learner. Of course there are deviations and different interpretations of these theories. Some of these are also examined. Specifically, these types of motivation must be defined and illustrated in order to arrive at the answer to the overlying question; which type works best in the motivating of today's students?

The primary goal of the review is to explore and to illustrate the most widely accepted theories and research into the concept of student motivation and its effects on success. The review includee three areas (a) the working definition and explanation of the theory of intrinsic motivation, (b) the working definition and explanation of the theory of extrinsic motivation, (c) some working definitions and explanations of theories that either deviate or blend these two commonly accepted theories, and (d) possible correlations between these motivational concepts and the motivation of a student when considering a standardized test.

Theory of Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation can be best defined as being the desire to engage in activity for the enjoyment of that activity itself. This concept works under the assumption that when a person

engages in an activity, he or she is doing so for the reason that he or she simply enjoys the act of doing that activity. The cliché “for love of the game” fits nicely here. Participants in activities are not rewarded for their efforts by any type of outside influence. Instead, they engage simply because they enjoy doing the activity. Thus, they feel the rewards come from within.

One of the classic studies that seems to support the effectiveness of intrinsic motivation was conducted in 1973 by Lepper, Greene and Nesbitt. In this study, 51 children were selected and divided into two groups. Each group was given the task of drawing as an activity. One group of students was rewarded for its efforts while the other was simply allowed to draw for the enjoyment of it. Lepper et al found that after 1-2 weeks, the group that was expecting the reward was no longer as interested in the activity as the one which was allowed to draw for the enjoyment of the activity. This seemed to support the theory that the intrinsic motivation may be more effective when considering children and that rewarding it may undermine its energy.

Some logistic issues must also be kept in mind when using intrinsic motivation in the classroom. What a school district views as important can sometimes counter these views. For instance, one must consider standardized tests and their relationship with school funding. If such tests continue to be the ways that governments allocate funds, students will continue to be measured and compared at the state and national level. Will students be again motivated only by their test score? Tauer (2009) pointed out a similar case and the dangers of over justification effect. Again, he relied on the studies of Lepper et al, but drew comparisons to reading programs at elementary schools. He pointed out that students who have received rewards, such as gift certificates, for reading find far less enjoyment in the act of reading than they did before receiving the reward. When motivating students, it would seem, educators need to carefully evaluate what perception they are sending to students as to what is most important in the

students' career. Is it the scores evaluated for funding and national recognition or is it the desire to obtain knowledge for use outside of the classroom?

Drawing from these two studies, one might infer that it is important to take these considerations into account when planning classroom instruction. Teachers must devise ways in which everyone gets what each wants. It will be important to keep students active and interested in their own learning. At the same time, teachers must consider the possible negative results on a student's motivation when utilizing extrinsic motivation for the group as a whole. The individual classroom environment and the way material is presented may be the key. If a teacher can continue to foster a student's motivation to complete tasks because he or she finds that task rewarding, that student will most likely also be learning the necessary skills that administrators tend to evaluate. The intrinsic motivation will ultimately be most effective when considering the learning process of a middle school aged student. If applied properly with consideration to the multiple factor that can influence the learning environment, the educational experience can be carried well beyond the walls of institutions.

The Theory of Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, generally operates under the theory that subjects will be motivated to engage when they are rewarded for their efforts. Here, subjects who are participating in an activity will essentially be motivated by the desire to obtain the reward that waits. An 'eyes on the prize' approach to motivating is most often taken here. With this type of motivation, often the desire to achieve will be in direct relation to the clout or value of the reward.

The easiest example of being motivated extrinsically would be to perform an activity for some sort of reward, such as pay. Here, an individual is paid for completing a task. However, there are also different ways that this form of reward system may be interpreted. For example, as Bell (2011) pointed out, if an individual selected a college based on prestige instead of interest in a degree or educational path, this could also be regarded as being motivated extrinsically.

The use of extrinsic motivation may be used frequently and to some degree of success in the modern business world. However, regarding education, research seemed to support the use of intrinsic motivation in the classroom to encourage the optimum performance from students, according to Kohn (2003). It seemed that the more a student enjoyed a particular activity, the more successful that student became. Kohn addressed this in his 2003 article. Kohn asserted that if students were only participating in an activity for the sole purpose of gaining a reward, then the activity itself ceased to be enjoyable for the students over time. This sentiment stressed the desire within a person as the key motivating factor to his/her success.

The concept of extrinsic motivation is typically linked to professional areas such as the business world or professional sports. Here, if an individual is successful in a task he or she is given some type of reward that is seemingly outside of him or herself. However, some studies have shown that this type of motivation may actually be internalized and not necessarily for the traditional form of extrinsic motivation as these motivators may be known as, what Pelletier et al. (1995) described as levels of self-determination.

Alternative Theories

Not all research agreed with the assumption that intrinsic motivation is the most pervasive cause for drive in a student. Some researchers concluded that intrinsic motivation simply does not exist

at all. Reiss (2005) wrote that there are several factors that drive a person's will. He stated that these factors cannot be simplified into only two categories. According to Reiss, what motivated a person could be categorized in several different ways that were all determined by the "desire, need, or motive of the individual" (p. 4). Here, motivation is different for each individual. Since all people are unique in personality, then all must have their own motivators.

Reiss (2005) borrowed from other researchers to provide working definitions for four other possible theories on motivation in his theoretical opinion paper. The idea of competence motivation was that the individual was "motivated by four drives: hunger, thirst, sex, and escape from pain" (p. 2). In internal-external motivation, the environment produced or instigated its own external motivators. The hedonistic theory asserted that the reason that individuals engaged in any kind of activity was simply for pleasure or enjoyment. Finally, the means-ends theory holds that when an individual was intrinsically motivated, he or she was doing something because it was what he or she wanted, while when he or she was motivated externally, he or she was doing something because he or she hoped to achieve or obtain something else.

Possible Correlation to Testing

The job of the educator is to consider these theories of motivation and evaluate which one(s) will work best to motivate students towards success. This can be applied generally or specifically, as this study hopes to explore, into the area of standardized testing. When considering how to best motivate students for standardized tests, Mitchell (1997) asserted that it must be understood that no one answer will suffice for every child or school district. Usher (2010) of The Center on Educational Policy, identified that some districts that fail to meet AYP may have been due to "harder tests, higher cut scores, or higher annual objectives" (p. 5). This implies that there will

most likely be no single answer as to how to properly motivate all students nationwide since no two districts or even schools may have the same testing situation. Thus, it may be beneficial to look more locally for information in regards to understanding how to best motivate a smaller group of students.

Mansfield reported, in a 2010 study with 195 Australian adolescents, that seemingly all students had the desire to succeed at some level, regardless the form of reward or tangible achievement. Each student polled in this survey answered that s/he wanted to be successful, but not all for the same reason. The answers varied greatly. The common thread that seemed to emerge was that each student seemed to have some sort of goal or standard in mind against which he or she measured his or her own success. This ranged from making a large salary to earning a parent's approval. This may suggest that the form of motivation for students is important, but may be too varied to be able to pinpoint. In other words, we may not be able to simply identify a student as being intrinsically, extrinsically, or otherwise motivated.

Shatzky (2010) seemed to echo the findings of the Australian study. He pointed out that students are not always driven by a sense of self image or immediate rewarding. Instead, he suggested that educators may need to help students identify the benefit of succeeding in present activities, so that instead of immediate gratification, future rewards could be recognized. This is very similar to the individual goal setting that was done by the Australian students.

The motivation and attitudes of students can often be influenced by outside pressure and stresses that may cause the performance of students to be less than optimal. A study conducted by the National Board of Educational Testing and Public Policy and authored by Clarke, Shore, Rhoades, Abrams, and Miao (2003) examined the impact of high stakes testing and its impact on

student attitude and motivation. Interviews with students in the states of Michigan, Kansas, and Massachusetts all sought to discover what, if any, positive or negative effect that state standardized testing had on students. The interviews indicated that students felt there were more negative effects of testing in regards to their educational outlook and experience, than positive ones. Clarke et al. identified that the causes of this negative impact were most often cited as “test-related stress....or over testing” (p. 73). In accordance with the theories of motivation and attitude, one could assume that these students most likely experienced feelings of low motivation or poor attitude due to these factors and pressures in regards to high stakes testing.

These findings, along with several other implications and opinions from educators, suggest that time may be best spent in individualizing motivation in schools and assisting students in the process of goal setting. The findings of this study are intended to hopefully assist with this for the Hermantown School District.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Every public school in Minnesota is required to administer standardized tests to its students in accordance with the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). The scores of these tests are important for the districts and are tied to such educational necessities as funding and curriculum. The Hermantown School District has failed to meet AYP for the last two years. As a result, the administration and staff had begun to consider what options should be explored to improve student scores, not only on the state tests, but any type of mass administered test.

The first goal of this study, as referenced in the review of literature chapter, was to examine research and studies on the concept of motivation in humans and students. This literature review looked at two main forms of motivation; intrinsic and extrinsic. This information is used when the results of the student and teacher survey is examined in order to consider what steps the district could take in improving testing programming and curriculum for students.

Participants

This study is being used as a beginning stage in the process of the Hermantown School District to better improve testing environment and preparation for its students. For that reason, the sample group that was used is relatively small in regards to the entire district. The sample that was selected for this study is this school year's (2011-12) current ninth and tenth graders. These are the graduating classes of 2014 and 2015. This specific sample has been selected for two reasons. First, they were among the group that was tested when the district failed to meet AYP. Second, they will be in the district for enough remaining years that if any programs or

curriculums are instituted by the district, the impact of such programming may be measured by the success or lack thereof made by this sample.

According to the Minnesota Department of Education (2011), the Hermantown School District services a student population of 2,068 in the preschool-12 grades. The school is the focal point of the community, which is best described as middle/upper class suburban. Less than 5% of all students have been identified as being of an ethnicity other than white. The students are divided into four buildings. The early childhood building houses preschool. The elementary school houses grades K-3. The middle school houses grades 4-8. The high school houses grades 9-12. The population trends in the district have changed slightly in recent years with the community seeing more nontraditional family structures. There has also been an increase in families applying for free and reduced lunch services. Of the entire student population of the Hermantown School District, this study examined 13% of students.

Instruments

The instrument that was used in this study was a two part survey intended to elicit student feedback regarding their feelings and attitudes toward standardized testing. The survey (Appendix A) had two sections. The first was a set of 7 Likert-scale questions that had a scale of 1-5 with 5 being extreme, or high, and 1 being none, or low. These questions were intended to gain insight into the sample's overall understanding of the testing procedures and their knowledge of the use and importance of the tests' scores. The instrument was developed for this research and was not piloted or reviewed by experts. It may have face validity but there was no attempt to assure its reliability or construct validity.

The second was a set of 5 questions that were open ended. These questions were intended to allow the students sampled to elaborate or to provide specific details about the attitudes of students in regards to standardized tests and time in school spent on testing. In addition, the open ended section was intended to elicit more nuanced opinions of the students regarding how well they feel prepared for taking standardized tests and what could possibly be done or implemented by the school district to improve the testing experience. The instrument was developed for this research and was not piloted or reviewed by experts. It may have face validity but there was no attempt to assure its reliability or construct validity.

Procedure

Only students in English classes of this year's ninth and tenth graders were included in this study. Students were told that their information was confidential and anonymous. They were not required to take the survey. The survey was administered and collected in one 50 minute class period. Students who were absent took the survey when they returned to school.

In order to gain a stronger understanding of the students of Hermantown School District's attitude toward standardized testing, and their academics in general to a lesser degree, a student survey requesting feedback regarding their attitudes towards standardized testing was administered. The surveys was administered in the winter of 2011. The reason for this was that all of the standardized testing for the entire district will be completed in May. By giving the survey at this time, students hopefully had sufficient time to effectively reflect and consider the questions asked by the survey.

The intention of the study was to identify any types of patterns found when analyzing the data. It was assumed that there might be patterns in the groups in general, or there might be a pattern that surfaces within one of the sub groups. The intention of the study was to take these results and begin to build programming and curriculum that will better equip Hermantown School District's students to take these types of tests.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes of Hermantown 9th and 10th graders regarding their attitudes towards standardized testing. The students surveyed are in the graduating classes of 2014 and 2015. These graduating classes were selected because these students have been performing consistently lower on standardized tests than students have in previous years. There were 142 9th graders (class of 2014-15) and 133 10th graders (class of 2013-14) surveyed in this study for a total of 275 students. The survey was distributed and collected in English classes during the school day and collected during the same class period. There were 275 surveys distributed and there were 275 surveys returned for a return rate of 100%. Each survey was at least partially completed, so there were no blank surveys and no students who chose not to participate.

Students were asked to respond to a series of questions that were in regards to how they felt about standardized testing. The first set of questions were 7 closed ended questions that were to be answered on a 5 point scale with 5 being extreme or high, and 1 being none, or low, in response to the question. The second set of questions was 5 open ended questions that solicited the students' personal interpretation and opinions regarding standardized testing. The following tables and explanations illustrate the results of the surveys.

Results for Closed Ended Survey

All results are reported in percentages. There are 275 students reporting in the student group labeled "All." There are 142 students reporting in the student group labeled "9th." There are 133

students reporting in the student group labeled “10th.” The bold type in the tables represents the highest percentage for that question per student group.

1. How much time do you spend in school on practicing test taking strategies?

%	All	Great Deal	Some	Little	None	No Ans
All	2	5	43	39	9	2
10 th	4	2	41	43	10	0
9 th	0	8	45	35	8	4

Of the 275 students surveyed, over 40% from each student group responded that they felt that they spent some time in school practicing test taking strategies. 43% of all students surveyed and 45% of ninth graders responded that they felt they spent some of their time in school practicing test taking strategies while 43% of 10th graders responded that they spent a little time in school practicing test taking strategies. 4% or less from each student group responded that they spent all their time in school practicing test taking strategies. 10% or less of each student group responded that they spend no time in school practicing test taking strategies.

2. How much time do you spend in school studying the information that is covered by the test?

%	All	Great Deal	Some	Little	None	No Ans
All	2	28	47	19	3	1
10 th	4	25	45	23	3	0
9 th	0	30	48	15	4	3

Of the 275 student surveyed, 45% or more of each student group responded that they felt that they spent some time in school studying the information that is covered on standardized tests. 25% or more of each student group also reported that they felt that they spent a great deal of time in school studying the information that is covered on standardized tests. At least 15% of

each student group reported that they felt that they spent a little time in school studying the information that is covered on standardized tests. 4% or less from each student group responded that they spend all of their time in school studying the information that is on a standardized test. 4% or less from each group responded that they spent no time in school studying the information that is on a standardized test.

3. How important do you feel that standardized tests are in regards to your education (graduating high school or preparing for college)?

%	Extremely	Very	Somewhat	A Little	Not	No Ans
All	19	40	26	9	5	1
10 th	18	40	27	11	4	0
9 th	20	40	25	6	6	3

Of the 275 students surveyed, exactly 40% from each student group responded they felt that standardized tests are very important to their education. At least 25% of each student group responded that standardized tests are somewhat important to their education. At least 18% of students from each group felt that standardized tests are extremely important to their education. 6% or less from each student group responded that they felt standardized tests were not important to their education. Approximately 60% of each group recognized their importance.

4. How prepared do you feel you are in general when taking a standardized test?

%	Extremely	Very	Somewhat	A Little	Not	No Ans
All	6	37	46	9	2	0
10 th	7	33	51	9	0	0
9 th	5	40	41	10	4	0

Of the 275 students surveyed, at least 41% of each student group responded that they felt somewhat prepared when taking standardized tests. At least 33% of each student group

responded that they felt very prepared when taking standardized tests. 7% or less from each student group responded that they felt extremely prepared when taking standardized tests. 4% or less from each student group responded that they felt not at all prepared when taking standardized tests.

5. How well do you understand why you have to take these tests?

%	Extremely	Very	Somewhat	A Little	Not	No Ans
All	19	34	32	8	6	1
10 th	17	32	38	8	5	0
9 th	21	36	28	6	6	3

Of the 275 students surveyed, at least 32% of each student group responded that they understood why they have to take standardized tests very well. At least 28% of each student group responded that they somewhat understood why they had to take standardized tests. 38% of 10th graders responded that they somewhat understood, and 28% of 9th graders responded the same. 34% of all students surveyed and 36% of 9th graders responded that they understood very well. At least 19% of all student groups responded that they understood why they had to take standardized tests extremely well. 8% or less from each group responded that they understood a little what they had to take these tests. 6% or less from each student group responded that they did not understand why they had to take standardized tests. 3% of 9th graders did not respond. Approximately 50% of each group understands very well why they are taking the tests.

6. How well do you understand how the tests' results are used?

%	Extremely	Very	Somewhat	A Little	Not	No Ans
All	9	30	41	12	6	2
10 th	10	26	45	14	5	0
9 th	9	33	37	11	6	4

Of the 275 students surveyed, at least 41% of each student group responded that they somewhat understood how the tests' results were used. At least 26% of each student group responded that they understood how the tests' results were used very well. At least 9% of each student group responded that they understood how the test results were used extremely well. 12% or less of each student group responded that they understood a little how the tests results were used. 6% or less from each student group responded that they did not understand how the test results were used. Less than 50% understand how the results are used.

7. What is your attitude when it comes to taking standardized tests?

%	Highly Positive	Somewhat Positive	Indifferent (don't care)	Somewhat Negative	Highly Negative	No Ans
All	12	38	27	15	5	3
10 th	14	30	35	15	4	2
9 th	10	46	19	15	6	4

Of the 275 students surveyed, at least 30% of each student group responded that they had a somewhat positive or better attitude regarding standardized tests. 38% of all students and 46% of 9th graders responded that their attitude was somewhat positive. 35% of 10th graders responded that they felt indifferent (didn't care) regarding standardized tests compared to 19% of the 9th graders. Exactly 15% of each student group responded that they had a somewhat negative attitude regarding standardized tests. At least 10% of each student group responded that they had a highly positive attitude regarding standardized tests. 6% or less from each student group responded that they had a highly negative attitude regarding standardized tests.

Result for Open Ended Survey

All results are reported in percentages. There are 275 students reporting in the student group labeled “All.” There are 142 students reporting in the student group labeled “9th.” There are 133 students reporting in the student group labeled “10th.” The bold type in the tables represents the highest percentage for that question per student group. The results of the open ended survey were compiled into groups based on the most common student responses.

Question 1: What do you think is the biggest problem that students have when taking a standardized test?

%	Attitude	Time	Stress	Unprepared	Other	No Ans
All	21	25	25	20	7	2
10 th	17	31	29	17	6	0
9 th	25	19	20	24	7	5

When asked what the biggest problem that students had when taking a standardized test, the answers of the 275 students that were surveyed were divided into 6 groups. The problems that were identified by the student groups through surveys were regarding: attitude, time, stress, preparedness, other (answers that did not fit into the previous categories), and those that were unanswered. 31% of 10th graders and 25% of the overall responses indicated that the student groups felt that the biggest problem student had was a matter of time allowed to complete the tests. 25% of 9th graders felt that the biggest problem students faced was regarding student attitude regarding the tests. At least 20% of all student groups responded that stress was the biggest problem. At least 17% of all student groups responded that the biggest problem facing students was in both their attitudes and being unprepared for the test. 7% or less of all student groups answered something other than the 4 most common responses, and 5% or less from each student group did not respond to the question.

Question 2: What do you do to prepare yourself for these types of tests that is different from a regular school day?

%	Self Care	Study	Nothing	Other	No Ans
All	29	39	27	4	1
10 th	30	36	31	3	0
9 th	28	42	24	4	2

When asked what they did to prepare themselves for standardized tests that were different from a regular school day, the answers of the 275 students surveyed were divided into 5 groups. The different forms of preparation from a regular school day that were identified were self care (sleep, eat, exercise, etc...), extra studying, nothing different, other (answers that did not fit into the previous categories), and those that were unanswered. The highest percentage of responses for each student group identified extra studying as the activity that was different. 39% of all students surveyed, 36% of 10th graders and 42% of 9th graders indicated studying of some sort as the activity they did to prepare for standardized tests. At least 28% for each student group responded that they did something different in terms of self care. At least 27% of each student group responded that they did nothing different to prepare for standardized tests. 4% or less from each student group answered something other than the 3 most common responses, and 2% or less of all student groups did not answer the question.

Question 3: Why do you think that some students score very high or very low on these tests?

	Attitude	Effort	Ability	Other	No Ans
All	23	37	34	4	2
10 th	17	40	39	2	2
9 th	28	36	28	6	2

When asked why they thought some student score either very high or very low on standardized tests, the answers of the 275 students were divided into 5 groups. The different groups of responses were student attitude (positive or negative), effort on the tests, student ability (high or low), other (answers that did not fit into the previous categories), and those that were unanswered. The highest percentage of responses from each student group identified student effort as the reason that students scored either very high or very low on standardized tests. 37% of all students surveyed, 40% of 10th graders and 36% of 9th graders indicated that student effort was the reason that students scored very high or very low on standardized tests. At least 28% of all student groups responded that high or low student ability was the reason for students' scores. At least 17% of all student groups responded that student positive or negative student attitude was the reason for high or low student scores. 6% or less of all student groups answered something other than the 3 most common responses, and 2% of all students did not answer the question.

Question 4: Do you feel a lot of pressure to do well on these tests? Why or why not?

%	Y-Extrinsic	Y-Intrinsic	No Pressure	Other
All	47	23	25	5
10 th	40	25	27	8
9 th	52	20	24	4

When asked if they felt a lot of pressure to do well on standardized tests and to indicate the reason why they do or do not, the responses of the 275 students surveyed were divided into 4 groups. The different groups of responses were yes-pressure felt from extrinsic sources, yes-pressure felt intrinsic sources, no pressure felt, and other (answers that did not fit into the previous categories). The extrinsic sources were identified as parents, grades, class rank, school funding/prestige, peer competition, and successful graduation. The intrinsic sources were

identified as self worth, value of education, future success, pride, and competition with self. The highest percentage of responses from each student group identified that yes, they did feel pressure to do well on standardized tests, and that pressure came from an extrinsic source. 47% of all students surveyed, 40% of 10th graders and 52% of 9th graders indicated extrinsic sources as the cause for pressure felt to succeed on standardized tests. At least 20% of all student groups indicated that yes, they felt pressure to do well on standardized tests due to an intrinsic source. At least 24% of all student groups responded that they felt no pressure regarding their performance on standardized tests. 8% or less of all student groups answered something different than the 3 most common responses. All students surveyed answered this question.

Question 5: What are some things that your school could do differently in order to help students better prepare for taking these tests?

%	More Time	Omit Test	Prepare Content	Provide Food	Prepare Strategy	Nothing	Other	No Answer
All	14	5	46	7	11	12	3	2
10 th	14	6	46	7	14	11	0	2
9 th	14	4	46	8	8	13	6	1

When asked what things their school could do differently in order to help students better prepare for taking standardized tests, the responses of the 275 student surveyed were divided into 8 groups. The different groups of responses were: allowing more time on the tests, omitting the tests entirely, preparing student in the content area of the test, providing food for students, preparing student in test taking strategies, nothing different, other (answers that did not fit into the previous categories), and those that were unanswered. The highest percentage of responses from each student group indicated that they felt that the school should prepare students the content area of the test. Each group responded with 46% of students responding this way. Exactly 14% of each student group responded that more time could be allowed on tests. At least

12% of each student group responded that nothing different need be done by the school. 8% or less of each student group responded that the school should provide students with food. At least 8% of each student group responded that the school should prepare students in test taking strategies. At least 5% of each student group responded that the school should entirely omit the tests. 3% of all students surveyed answered something different than the 6 most common answers, and at least 1% of each student group did not answer the question.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes of Hermantown 9th and 10th graders regarding standardized testing. The students surveyed are in the graduating classes of 2014 and 2015. These graduating classes were selected because these students have been performing consistently lower on standardized tests than students have in previous years. There were 142 9th graders (class of 2014-15) and 133 10th graders (class of 2013-14) surveyed in this study for a total of 275 students. The survey was distributed and collected in English classes during the school day and collected during the same class period. There were 275 surveys distributed and there were 275 surveys returned for a return rate of 100%. Each survey was at least partially completed, so there were no blank surveys and no students who chose not to participate.

The following discussion is an attempt to better analyze the results of the survey that were presented in the previous chapter. Not all survey results or findings are represented in this chapter, but only those that have provided particular areas of interest to the researcher.

Students were asked to respond to a series of questions that were in regards to how they felt about standardized testing. The first set of questions were 7 likert-scale questions that were to be answered on a 5 point scale with 5 being extreme or high, and 1 being none in response to the question. The second set of questions was 5 open ended questions that solicited the students' personal interpretation and opinions regarding standardized testing.

A major focus of the student survey was on the concept of motivation and the pressures that contribute to the students' motivation towards these types of standardized tests. The results of the student surveys showed that a vast majority of students do, in fact, feel pressure to perform

at a high level on these tests. There were common categories of responses that reflected the sources of pressures that students felt. These seemed to be very similar to the findings of the Mansfield (2010) study. Of the overall 275 students that were surveyed, 70% of all students surveyed responded that they do feel pressured or are motivated to perform at a high level on standardized tests. Of that 70%, 23 percent of the overall group indicated some sort of internal motivator, such as self worth, value of education, future success, pride, and competition with self to be the key factor that motivates a student to do well on these tests. The other 47% indentified some type of outside factor to be the primary motivator in the desire to succeed on these tests. This may mean, that in accordance with studies of both Lepper et al. (1973) and Tauer (2009), the reason that this group has been scoring lower than what is needed to meet AYP, is because they are motivated or pressured by factors that are extrinsic as opposed to intrinsic, the latter having been shown to be a more positive and successful form of motivation in students.

The general perception of the students who were surveyed regarding attitude toward the standardized tests emerges as being a point of interest. In the open ended response section of the survey, 21% of all students responded that they felt attitude was the main factor in determining whether or not a student will be successful on a standardized test. These survey responses seemed to suggest that students feel that if they approach standardized tests with a positive attitude, they will ultimately be more successful. The opposite is suggested for students who take the same tests with a negative attitude.

Interestingly, the student responses in the closed survey section were not in line with this sentiment, or in line with the low scores that have traditionally been earned by this student group. The students surveyed indicated that they were nearly split in regards to the attitude that they had when approaching standardized tests. 50% of these students indicated that they take standardized

tests with a positive attitude, while 50% of students indicated that they had either a negative attitude, or were indifferent regarding the tests.

This again, could be considered to be in line with the findings of Lepper et al. (1973). The students who indicated a negative or indifferent attitude have most likely been taking standardized tests in one form or another for several years over their school careers. Much like the children in the Lepper et al. study, there may be the possibility that the reward that comes with taking standardized testing has either worn off or become uninteresting or are no longer appealing to the student. At the same time, attitude is something that can be modified and so it may be possible with the right interventions to improve attitudes and efforts.

The students who indicated that they approach standardized testing with a positive attitude may be reflected in the nearly 60% of students who indicated that they felt the tests were either very important or extremely important in regards to their education. This could reflect the findings of Bell (2011). Even though the Bell study indicated that students were highly motivated by extrinsic means when determining higher education, the correlation between attitudes if the sampled students may mean that they see the progression to college degree as a motivating source and thus, approach the tests with a positive attitude. On the other hand stress and anxiety over test-taking may interfere with student efforts and desires for strong outcomes.

Student test preparation and their perceptions of preparation were also asked about in the survey. The student response in regards to whether or not they spent much time in school in preparing for the tests in either content or strategy was fairly expected, with most responses being in the “some of the time” category. Of all of the students surveyed, 43% responded that

they spent some time in school practicing test taking strategies, and 47% of all students surveyed indicated that they felt they spent some of the time studying the content of standardized tests.

The notable part of the student responses in this area was the difference in the percentage of students who responded to these questions with “a great deal” or “little/none.” Of all of the students surveyed, only 7% responded that they felt they spent a great deal of time or more in school practicing test taking strategies while 48% responded that they spent little or no time practicing testing strategies. The responses to the content related questions were distributed more evenly. 30% of the students surveyed felt that they spent a great deal or more of their time in school studying the content on the standardized tests, while 21% of these students indicated that they spent little or no time in school on the content of the tests. This discrepancy could be the result of student perception. It is entirely possible that the students that indicated that they spent little or no time preparing for standardized tests do not see the connection between content presented in school and its relevancy to standardized tests. Conversely, it is possible that those students who indicated that they spent a great deal of time in school preparing for the standardized tests may see a greater connection between the content presented in school and its relevancy to standardized tests.

Students were also asked what they did personally to better prepare themselves for taking standardized tests. The survey responses to this question were surprisingly uniform, with most students responding with one of three responses. 39% of all students surveyed responded that they prepared for standardized testing by spending extra time studying. These responses were essentially centralized around preparation methods such as reading over class notes, reading past test samples, or using flash cards in the subject area to name a few. These responses seemed to be somewhat inconclusive as far as what it is exactly that students would do on their own time to

prepare for a standardized test due to the vast number of studying or test practicing methods that were identified by the students surveyed.

The student responses in regards of self maintenance and its role in preparing for taking standardized tests were a bit more direct. In the survey, 29% of the 275 students identified that they took different steps in regards to their health and well being than they typically would on a non testing school day. These responses almost exclusively identified self maintenance in the form of sleeping more the night before a testing date, eating a healthy breakfast the morning of a testing date, and drinking more water on a testing date as being the best method of preparing for a standardized test. Interestingly, 27% of students surveyed indicated that they did absolutely nothing different to prepare for a standardized test.

Another key area of the survey was the perception as to why students either perform well or poorly on standardized tests. The majority of all student surveyed either identified either student ability or effort as the primary reason for performance on standardized tests. 71% of all students surveyed indicated that performance was in relation to these two areas with 37% identifying effort, or lack thereof, as the main factor, and 34% identifying student ability, or lack thereof, as the main factor. In this study, students feel that a great deal of 'students in general' feel that student achievement on standardized tests is due to effort, which is something that is within their control. This indicated that some students believe that the harder they try, the better their results will be. This effort may be reflective of the Mansfield (2010) study. In this study, students indicated that they had the desire to succeed. If the Hermantown sample is in line with the Mansfield study, than perhaps the students who indicate that student effort is a strong factor in figuring student achievement on standardized tests, it is possible that those students are the same ones who have indicated strong positive intrinsic or extrinsic motivators towards success

on the tests. If students had identified the form or venue in which they would like to succeed, their efforts into correlated activities will improve as will results.

A common thread among the open ended survey results was that some students seemed equipped with a stronger desire to succeed or they have a higher natural skill set than others. These responses seem to be reflections of the studies of Pelletier et al (1995) and the “levels of self-determination,” of Reiss’s (2005) desire of the individual. If the desire of the individual is the main motivator, than effort among the students who are internally motivated will increase.

Students surveyed were also asked to identify the issues or problems that faced them while taking a standardized test, and what the school district could do differently in order to better help students succeed on these types of tests. The response in to the question of the problems facing this group of students was fairly evenly distributed into 4 student identified categories. 20% of all students surveyed felt that they were unprepared to take the test. Responses that fit this category were those that identified not knowing content area, or not having a strong testing strategy. 21% of students responded that attitude was an issued that faced students when taking these tests. This category is described as students who do not have a positive outlook on their school, education, tests, or their peers, thus would not have a positive attitude or the desire to succeed on the tests. 25% of students identified stress as a problem facing students. This stress was usually described as pressures placed on the students by themselves, their parents, the school district, or the need to compete with their peers. 25% of all students responding noted a lack of time to complete the tests as the major problem facing students.

These identified problem areas were also represented in student responses regarding what the school district could do to help students better prepare for taking standardized tests. The vast

majority of students identified that the school district could do something in the way of preparation for students to help them succeed on these tests. 57% of all student surveyed indicated that more preparation in the areas of content and testing strategies were something that the school district could provide. 19% of students surveyed indicated that the school district could either allow for more time to complete the tests, or omit the test entirely. 13% indicated that the school district should not do anything different. The area that was not reflected in this section of the survey was the idea of outside pressures on students.

Recommendation

One of the purposes of this study was to use the student responses and information gained regarding students' attitudes and perceptions of standardized tests and to explore various steps that could be taken in the Hermantown School District in an attempt to better prepare students to take standardized tests so that the district could meet AYP. The results of the surveys were shared informally with the high school staff at a faculty meeting to begin the process of formulating a plan that would improve student test scores. The following represents the basic areas that may be considered as a part of this process.

1. The school district should inform students and parents of the use and intention of standardized tests when they are approaching. This could be done in the form of a mailer or meeting. The information presented should identify the content area of the test, the grade level that will be assessed, the impact that the test scores have on the district and the student, and tips for parents and students regarding self maintenance procedures that are accepted as being effective in the preparation of student success on tests.

2. The school district should offer students from all grade levels an optional course in successful testing strategies. This should be offered during the regular school day and not be a graded or required course. The focus of this course would be on general testing strategies only. There would not be any content areas taught in this course. The curriculum for this course would be developed by the district testing administrator.
3. The school district should adapt a testing preparation segment as a part of the curriculum for each of the content areas that are tested. This segment should be developed by departments and include the entire K-12 staff. There should be planning time provided by the school district to allow for the development of this curriculum.
4. The school district should develop a series of building assemblies to educate students of all grade levels as to the administration, evaluation, and usage of results of standardized tests. The concept behind this suggestion is to better educate students in the general concept at the root of standardized tests with the hopes of alleviating some of the undue pressures that may be the result of ill informed students.

The overall goal of these recommendations is that students will feel better equipped to take standardized tests as a result of the extra test preparation. This could alleviate some of the anxieties that students indicated as a result of feeling ill prepared. Another part of the goal would be to inform students about the purpose of the test and the possible impact that the result may have on the students' futures. The hope would be that if students actually are motivated by the inner drive to succeed, they may be more apt to approach the test with a more positive attitude and the scores may improve. Also, if the students are better informed as to why they are taking the test, the indifferent attitude that seemed so prevalent, they may begin to see the value in the tests themselves and also the value of a better effort and attitude towards the test.

These suggestions and recommendation are made with the intent of better preparing Hermantown students to successfully perform on standardized tests. These are not the outline of a reconstruction of the current district curriculum, or content curriculum.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Student Closed Ended Survey

Please circle the number that best represents your thoughts or feelings regarding the following statements or questions:

Note: The term “standardized test” used in the following is intended to refer to any type of test required by the state, school district or building in which all students participate and their results are analyzed for any given purpose either publically or privately. Examples would include MCAs, SATs, CATs, ACTs, NWEAs, etc...

1. How much time do you spend in school on practicing test taking strategies (how to best take a test)?
 1. All of the time
 2. A great deal of time
 3. Some of the time
 4. Little of the time
 5. None of the time
2. How much time do you spend in school studying the information that is covered by the test?
 1. All of the time
 2. A great deal of the time
 3. Some of the time
 4. Little of the time
 5. None of the time
3. How important do you feel that standardized tests are in regards to your education (graduating high school or preparing for college)?
 1. Extremely valuable
 2. Very valuable
 3. Somewhat valuable
 4. A little valuable
 5. Not valuable at all
4. How prepared do you feel you are in general when taking a standardized test?
 1. Extremely prepared
 2. Very well prepared
 3. Somewhat prepared
 4. A little prepared
 5. Not prepared at all
5. How well do you understand why you have to take the tests?
 1. Extremely well
 2. Very well
 3. Somewhat
 4. A little
 5. Not at all
6. How well do you understand how the test’s results are used?

1. Extremely well
 2. Very well
 3. Somewhat
 4. A little
 5. Not at all
7. What is your attitude when it comes to taking standardized tests?
1. Highly positive
 2. Somewhat positive
 3. Indifferent (don't care)
 4. Somewhat negative
 5. Highly negative

Open Ended Student Survey

Answer the following in your own words. All information will be kept anonymous. Answer with your own thoughts and opinions, not how you think a teacher would want to hear.

1. What do you think is the biggest problem that students have when taking a standardized test?

2. What do you do to prepare yourself for these types of tests that is different from a regular school day?

3. Why do you think that some students score very high or very low on these tests?

4. Do you feel a lot of pressure to do well on these tests? Why or why not?

5. What are some things that your school could do differently in order to help students prepare better for taking these tests?

Appendix B

Informed Consent

You have been selected to participate in a study conducted by Mr. Scott Larson through the University of Wisconsin-Superior as a part of a Master's degree program. The purpose of this study is to inquire about the general attitudes of Hermantown students in regards to standardized testing. I am reading this to you so that you are aware of your rights.

You will be asked to complete a survey and return it to Mr. Larson once it is completed. The survey should only take about ten minutes to complete. By participating, you should understand there are no risks or dangers to you or your school records. All information is confidential and anonymous. No link will be made between your answers and you as an individual. You are not required to take this survey and there is no penalty for not answering any or all questions.

If you have any questions regarding the study you can direct these to Mr. Scott Larson at Hermantown High School (218)729-8874 ext 1239 or to Mr. Jim Miller, IRB Coordinator UW Superior, Superior WI (715 394 8396). This study was approved by the UW-Superior IRB; #734

Since this is a voluntary survey, you may chose not to participate and will face no penalty for doing so but, at the same time, we would like to know your attitudes towards test-taking.

Thank You.

This study was approved by the UW-Superior IRB; #734